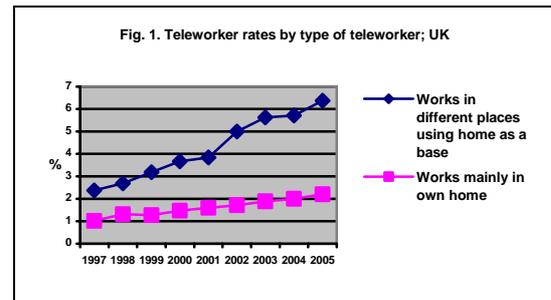


HSE HORIZON SCANNING INTELLIGENCE GROUP SHORT REPORT FLEXIBLE WORKING AND EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

1. Issue

Status:
Active
Monitoring

Work is becoming increasingly flexible, with growing numbers of people teleworking (working from other locations using the home as a base or working from home), working part-time and shift working. Employment patterns are also changing, becoming increasingly precarious. Companies are making greater use of short term contracts, temporary workers, and the self-employed. In general however, full-time permanent jobs remain the foundation of the UK labour market.



- Currently, 8% of the workforce are teleworkers.¹ It is suggested that by 2015, 70-80% of workers could be, at least partially, working from a remote location.²
- As shown in Figure 1, growth in teleworking has been driven mainly by an increase in people working in different places using home as a base, rather than working from home, levels of which have remained relatively stable.
- Teleworking is more common, and is growing at a faster rate, among older workers.
- The number of people with second jobs increased by 68% between 1984 and 2001, rising to its highest level of 1.3 million in 1996, levelling to 1.15 million by 2003.³
- The majority of new jobs to 2014 will be part-time.⁴
- Shift work has remained constant over the past decade. However, continued movement towards a 24-hour society may generate increased demand.

The workforce is becoming and will continue to become increasingly diverse. To accommodate this, greater diversity in working patterns may be required to ensure that staff with specific needs - perhaps due to age, disability, care responsibilities, etc - are attracted and retained by employers. Employers will need to do this because of a potential short fall in the labour force, and in response to changing legislation.

2. Relevance to Occupational Health & Safety

Flexible working patterns offer benefits to both employers and employees. Employers might experience increased productivity and employment, whereas workers may experience greater control and flexibility, and in some cases, reduced stress. Increased adoption of flexible work and employment patterns may also pose potential challenges for health and safety. Heightened importance will be placed on monitoring the health and safety of increasing numbers of workers using remote (and changing) locations, on ensuring accurate reporting of accidents and ill-health among workers with flexible or

¹ Ruiz & Walling (2005). Home-based working using communication technologies. Labour Market Trends, October 2005, ONS.

² Ryan (2002). The technology revolution. Economic reports, The Marubeni Corporation Economic Research Institute.

³ Simic & Sethi (2002). People with second jobs. Labour Market Trends, May 2002, ONS.

⁴ Wilson et al. (2006). Working Futures: New Projections of Occupational Employment by Sector and Region, 2004-2014. Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick.

precarious work/employment patterns, and on ensuring that methods for preventing and managing risks for workers whose work location is not fixed are effective, for instance. HSE recently published new guidance on managing the health and safety of agency workers.⁵ This guidance should help to remove the confusion that appeared to exist among employers regarding their responsibilities for contracted or temporary workers.^{6,7}

3. Implications

The health and safety implications of the increased adoption of flexible work and employment patterns are wide ranging. For instance:

- Part-time and temporary workers may not always receive equal training opportunities or health and safety protection, compared to full-time, permanent employees.^{8,9}
- Precarious forms of employment may generate feelings of job insecurity and stress, as a result of isolation or conflicting demands arising from the blurred distinction between work and home life. Higher levels of job insecurity typically experienced by temporary workers can result in impaired well being, and less desirable attitudes and behaviours towards work.^{10,11,12}
- Temporary workers are likely to be at increased risk of injury, as the risk of workplace injury is increased during the first 4 months within a new job.¹³
- Although part-time workers spend less time at work, their injury rate per hour worked is higher than those working full-time.
- Due to the increasing numbers of workers engaged in shift work, it is important not only to monitor and minimise known risks (e.g. those relating to disruption of circadian rhythm), but also to respond to any new evidence identifying associations between shift work and ill health.
- HSE provide guidance on homeworking. However, as the majority of the growth over the past decade has been in teleworking from alternative locations (i.e. hotel, car) using the home as a base (rather than homeworking as such), attention should also be paid to potential health and safety issues relating to these forms of working.

4. Recommendations

HSE will continue to horizon scan in order to remain abreast of new, emerging, or growing evidence regarding this issue, and will continue to work with colleagues, both inside and outside HSE, in exploring the implications and agreeing action as appropriate.

Zara Whysall, Horizon Scanning Section, HSL

⁵ HSE (2006). Agency workers' health and safety. Available at: <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk>

⁶ Winkler et al. (2003). Contractorisation – Aspects of health and safety in the supply chain. HSE Research Report 112.

⁷ Croner Health and Safety Briefing, 323, 3-4.

⁸ Wiseman & Gilbert (2000). Survey of the recruitment agencies industry. HSE Research Report 284.

⁹ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2003). Temporary agency work in the EU.

¹⁰ Lewchuk et al. (2003). From job strain to employment strain: Health effects of precarious employment. *Just Labour*, 3, 23-35.

¹¹ Cooper (2002). The changing psychological contract at work. *Occupational & Environmental Medicine*, 59, 355.

¹² Parker et al. (2002). Effect of temporary contracts on perceived work characteristics and job strain: A longitudinal study. *Personnel Psychology*, 55, 689-717.

¹³ Davies & Jones (2005). Trends and context to rates of workplace injury. HSE Research Report 386.